

Tape #010

Morgan and Irma Carpenter Merkley

Interviewed by Mike Brown.

Mike Brown: This is an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Morgan Merkley, 1389 North 2500 West, Vernal, Utah on this 9 February 1978. This is Mike Brown of the Golden Age Center.

Morgan Merkley (Morgan): Does it matter what we tell about first, the livery stable or Wong Sing?

Irma Merkley (Irma): I can't tell much about Wing Song.

MB: Tell me, what do you remember about Wong Sing, what kind of man was he?

Morgan: He was a real businessman.

Irma: I can't remember much even about his facial features, whether he wore whiskers or anything. It seems to me that his hair was a little bit on the reddish side, but I might be wrong.

Morgan: If he was a married man, I never knew his wife.

Irma: No.

MB: Did he have other people there with him, other members of the family?

Morgan: Working with him?

MB: Yes.

Morgan: Not that I know of, until later years when this Wong Wing come in and took over the business. He got a little wore out.

Irma: I think Wong himself was a bachelor; I don't think he was married. But I'm not sure of that; I've just heard that said here and there. He didn't appear to have a wife.

Morgan: Lots of people went from here over there to trade with him because they liked him so well. That was horse and buggy days, so it was a long ways.

Irma: Yes.

MB: Did you ever trade with him?

Morgan: Yes.

Irma: Morgan did with him, I didn't so much. I traded after his son came in.

Morgan: He catered to the Indians. That's the reason he located there.

Irma: He was a real friend to the Indians but he was a friend to everyone else, too. When Jenny got in there... I've always had a foot problem and Jenny could fit me till I didn't feel a thing. I could walk out of there if I wanted to, put a new pair of shoes on and never have to break them in. She would measure from the ball of the foot to the arch, and she would say you have a long something because I had such a little place in here, and you know, if you get one that starts to come up right here, you can suffer terrible. That throws the foot up there on that arch where you can't stand it.

So she knew her shoes. She was educated in that I'm sure. She must've. It might've been a normal talent. But she understood her shoes and her patients. I could go in there, oh, maybe after I'd been in there a year and a half and she would get it. She knew she didn't forget. You know, that's a lot in a person's life when they're dealing with the public.

MB: Well, so, you would go all the way from Maeser over to that town.

Morgan: Yes.

MB: Now which location was this?

Morgan: That was the one down south of US 40 and east of Fort Duchesne.

Irma: But we did the most of our trading up on highway. That's where I first remember him. I had an aunt that went over there regularly to trade with him.

MB: Was he pretty good with people? Would he carry credit and things like that?

Morgan: Oh, yes.

Irma: I wouldn't know about that because we didn't used to ask for credit. We bought what we could afford to pay for.

MB: Well, I heard you used credit. Just out of curiosity, could you tell me what credit was like in those days?

Irma: I don't know.

MB: What was credit like in those days? Did they charge interest just like they do now?

Morgan: Oh, they charged you a carrying charge, but not like it is now. (Laughs)

Irma: Say we charged \$25.25 a month. Later, we could go back and pay \$25.25 and that settled the bill.

Morgan: We used to get two and a half percent on savings.

MB: Oh, in the banks.

Morgan: In the banks.

MB: That's not very much.

Morgan: Wouldn't go very far today would it?

MB: No, it sure wouldn't.

Irma: That was the lean years. They were the lean years.

Morgan: Then we had another man here in town who loaned his money and when the sheepmen would get in a pinch, he'd charge them eighteen percent.

Irma: Then up and take over the sheep because he would wait till they got in a pinch and then capitalize on it.

MB: Was that during hard years?

Morgan: Yes, in hard years. You know, they never used to sell lambs. They sold wethers in the early days.

Irma: That was called mutton.

Morgan: Talking about hard times, we used to have a little bunch of sheep up on the ranch. We'd sell our wool and they'd give us \$1 a head fleece down. When we delivered the wool, we got the balance. One year I sold mine for that, dollar down, advance they'd call it, and I had to dig half of it back up.

Irma: To pay for storing charges.

MB: Storing charges?

Morgan: It didn't bring a dollar a fleece is what I'm saying.

MB: The price in wool dropped that year?

Irma: Yes.

Morgan: Them's hard times.

MB: Now, you have cattle here, or you used to have?

Morgan: They're gone now.

MB: Did you have cattle? I've heard the winter of 1919-20 was a bad winter.

Irma: That's right.

MB: Did you have stock?

Morgan: Yes, we had stock.

MB: How did you get through that winter?

Morgan: Well, my father come out here in hard times and we always prepared for them bad, lean years. That's how we got by.

Irma: But the one year we ran out of hay and we traded a cow for a ton of hay.

Morgan: No, we didn't.

Irma: What did we trade?

Morgan: We traded a ton of hay for a cow.

Irma: But, we ran out of hay.

Morgan: No, we didn't. We had hay.

Irma: Oh, that's how it was then. Anyway, to make the hay last, or I ran out before spring, he used to go down on the riverbank and cut down big cottonwood trees so that when they fell over into the meadows, the cows and the sheep could nibble on those little top greens. We saved our herds that way, sheep and cattle, both, one year. But, oh, he cut down an awful lot of trees.

Morgan: That wasn't in '19, though.

Irma: I don't know just when that was.

Morgan: That was when we were just married, so you know nothing about that. (Laughs)

Irma: Well, we hadn't been married very long in 1919.

Morgan: That's what I said.

Irma: But I can remember you cutting down trees up there.

Morgan: Not in '19, you can't.

Irma: I'm not so sure.

MB: Do you remember the influenza epidemic?

Irma: Oh, yes.

MB: What was that like here?

Morgan: Well, it was terrible. It started along in the fall of '18 and all through that winter they could hardly keep up with burying people here in the valley. We had one man who put in the whole winter just a-helping people, nurse them, and different things. That was Fuller Remington.

MB: Did you know a lot of people who died?

Irma: Oh, yes.

MB: Did any of your family die?

Irma: None of our immediate family, but when Myron died, they held the funeral on his mother's lawn.

Morgan: That was right in the beginning of it, too.

Irma: Yes, that was in October 1918. They made masks for all of us. Well, I went into Aunt Mame's kitchen and helped make masks for people who came to the funeral. We didn't dare get too close to each other because of that. We were lucky we didn't take it. He was in the east selling his father's cattle and came back to Salt Lake and he died there on his way home.

Morgan: He didn't get back to Salt Lake, he took sick in Wyoming.

Irma: Well, I think they got him back to Salt Lake before he died.

MB: Someone told me they would put eucalyptus drops on those masks. Did they?

Irma: Yes.

MB: What was the purpose of that?

Irma: Disinfectant. I don't know. It didn't do anything. There's nothin' to eucalyptus.

Morgan: We had an old man around here who wore his mask and he cut a hole in it so he could smoke his pipe. (Laughs).

Irma: And that was the part that was suppose to have been covered!

Morgan: You talk about that winter, it kept me busy just driving hearse.

Irma: Morgan drove the hearse for a long time for the mortician.

MB: Who was the mortician?

Morgan: Elmer Dillman.

MB: Elmer Dillman.

Morgan: And he died before he got through the winter.

Irma: The strange thing was, Morgan had taken sick in a canyon, this was in 1919, and my younger brother was up there with us and he went out and got the team. I helped him harness them so we could bring Morgan to town. We stopped at Mother's, my mother, and while we were there, there went the hearse and it had a black casket in it. Morgan said, "That's Elmer Dillman." We wanted to know how he knew and he said, "Because Elmer had a black casket there, said if he died before that was sold, he was going to be buried in it." And he was.

MB: Was he the son of Pete?

Morgan: Yes.

MB: Did you know Pete?

Morgan: You bet.

MB: Could you tell me something about him. What kind of man was he?

Morgan: He was a very individual man, Pete Dillman was. We went prospecting once and he left me to do the diggin' while he went and prospected.

Irma: He was just a kid.

Morgan: Now this here I wouldn't want you to put in any book. He was very bitter toward the Church.

Irma: The LDS Church.

MB: I've heard that from the family.

Morgan: I've hauled a load of coal over to Arch Allen for his threshing machine and happened to be camped at his son-in-law's place and his [Dillman's] younger son had gone on a mission. A

letter come into him that night while I was there. They handed him the letter and he never opened it; he just walked over to the stove and threw it in.

MB: That is bitter. Was he a popular man in the community, though?

Morgan: Oh, yes.

Irma: Everyone thought a lot of him, too.

Morgan: Game warden for years.

MB: I heard there were a lot of funny stories about the poachers and him?

Morgan: I don't know about that, but he was the game warden for a long while. Rode a little old white pony.

MB: Did you know Uncle Jake Workman?

Morgan: Yes, but I wouldn't tell you anything 'cause he's got grandchildren around here that can tell you.

MB: Well, I was wondering did you ever go to his dance hall or his hall?

Irma: I went a time or two with my father and mother.

MB: What was the hall like?

Irma: Oh, I don't remember. I can remember it was high because they had a trapeze affair up there and his son, how he used to get on there and just scare the life out of us when he would jump from one to the other. You've seen them swing back and forth. I just knew he was going to miss, but he didn't.

MB: Well, did you get into town very often when you were a boy?

Morgan: No, very seldom we went to town.

MB: Was that quite a treat?

Morgan: Oh, it was a holiday.

MB: What kind of things did you do?

Morgan: Just go to town, that was all. There wasn't anything to do, of course. When we got to be young men, then we'd go to town and visit the confectionaries and different things. My Uncle Jake's hall was along 6th West and just south of [Highway] 40.

Irma: Right there where the....

MB: Near the tabernacle?

Morgan: Right where the coal yard is. The coal yard. Now, Lee Workman has a grandson and he could tell you more about Uncle Jake Workman. He always wore boots and he wore one pant leg in and one out.

MB: Can you tell me something about the tabernacle? What's your earliest remembrances of our tabernacle?

Morgan: The tabernacle. Well, I can't tell you a lot, but the first I remember was George Hislop, hauling rock right down by our place that went into it. I can remember that.

MB: Can you remember when they were building it?

Morgan: Oh, yes.

Irma: I lived across, kitty-corner across, the street when they were building it.

Morgan: I was a little boy, but I do remember that. His daughter lives just over here.

MB: Were you at the dedication?

Morgan: I don't think so.

Irma: I doubt it.

MB: You would've been real young.

Irma: Just small.

Morgan: I don't think our parents took us, as I can remember. I'm sure we didn't. Now, Nelly Allen might know something about that.

Irma: That's Mrs. Mary Ann Allen.

Morgan: She might give you something on that tabernacle.

MB: Well, the reason I asked is that I would like to see the tabernacle protected. I mean, you know there are some people that want to tear it down.

Irma: They came near it one time a few years ago.

MB: See, if I can help get the tabernacle put on the list of national historic sites, then it can't be torn down. That's why I asked you what you remember about the tabernacle.

Irma: I can remember going over and sitting on the front, come out (?) as I remember it, this way. It's been a long time since I was there now and we used to sit one on one side and one on the other, my sister and I, and watch through the open front as they worked.

Morgan: Oh, I was young, but I do (?) rock, hauled 'em with a wagon.

Irma: They were great big blocks, weren't they? That was the foundation.

MB: When you were young, did they use the tabernacle just for conferences? Was it used for anything else?

Irma: Not that I know of.

Morgan: Not that I remember of.

MB: Like would they ever have, like, a Christmas pageant or program or anything like that?

Irma: Well, not when we were very young, but later they did. We have been down to several of their Christmas programs, but they had very little room up front to place a stage and make anything that they wanted to act out. But we have gone to concerts and things like that, and well, pageants.

Morgan: I can remember when the high council used to pass the sacrament in the tabernacle at conference time.

Irma: Oh, yes. That was a long thing. And when they started to bury people or bring people in on these wheels... One of our patriarchs was wheeled right down the center of that thing and people fainted because they thought the spirit was just moving him. They had no idea, because there was no pallbearers there, the mortician behind just pushing him up the aisle and people fainted in that funeral because they thought that the spirit of his body or the Lord himself or something was bringing him right in.

MB: Was that Israel Justus Clark?

Irma: No, that was, well [doesn't say who] was the first one. I think he was the first one, this one that I'm telling about, but who would he go to to find that one? May Calder?

Morgan: I don't know how May's mind is, if it's all right. May's quite a lot older than I am.

Irma: Oh, but you remember when Uncle Jim was buried.

Morgan: Well, I think May could talk to him alright. I don't know if you have talked to her or

not.

MB: Is that Mrs. Calder of Calder's Dairy or am I thinking of Caldwell? The ones that had the creamery?

Irma: Well, it was her in-laws.

Morgan: Her husband was in that family, he wasn't the one who owned it. That was Hiram B.

MB: I've talked with one Mrs. Calder last fall. I'm not sure if it was May or not, but she was real sick. She said she didn't want to do it until she felt better.

Irma: She was in her 80s; she is in her 80s. Yes, she is.

Morgan: Her husband was an attorney, also president of the stake at one time.

MB: Did you ever run cattle up here on Taylor? Was there an allotment system a long time ago or was it just anyone could go up there?

Morgan: This forest reserve come into being, I think, around 1905. Before that it was just everybody's. Then, since then, you had to have a permit and pay the government so much for your right to run on it. Privilege, I guess, ain't right. It's privilege.

MB: Well, would you go up for an entire summer?

Morgan: Yes.

Irma: The cattle went about the first of June. They went earlier then that.

Morgan: We would go on along sometime in the middle of April, we would go up. Much longer season then we have now.

Irma: But each man rode for his own cattle; that is, one man would go and check all of them while he was there.

Morgan: Well, they would just mingle together.

Irma: They were all together. Well, the mountain was that way, too. It wasn't divided by fences like it is now.

Morgan: Oh, like I said, they just all mingled together.

Irma: And they would just check during the summer to see if every thing was all right. But then they started to put fences and make allotments that way. Or maybe the cows would be in a certain area for so many days and then they would be transferred to another one. I don't know

when that was started.

MB: How far up Taylor would you run your cattle?

Morgan: Oh, we used to go clear up back into what they called Odericer (?) Creek pasture that was way along Ashley Creek, way above Red Bread Pond.

MB: Did you ever use that... Oh, what is? That Thornbury Road?

Morgan: I've been over it, but that's further back than our cattle went. When they do Odericer Creek, we'd go through by the Red Pine and across through that way to the cattle.

MB: The Red Pine Road?

Morgan: Well, there's no road only through the red pine and from there on there was a very poor trail. They tell me that a good trail is there now, but in my day there wasn't.

MB: I heard that there was drought here in the '30s.

Morgan: In '34.

MB: Can you tell me about that?

Morgan: I can tell you experience. I just gone in debt up here for twenty-three acres of ground to the government, and I, well, I went to jump over my haystack. I raised fifteen bushel of grain, but my expenses went on just the same. I had to dig up my money. It was a real hard time, that's all I can say about it.

Irma: Has a little tiny haystack.

MB: Did you have to buy feed somewhere?

Morgan: Well, fortunately I had the place on the canyon where we were living, [so] I had a way to get by. That's when Uncle Sam came in and bought the cows.

Irma: And they slaughtered them.

Morgan: Give four dollars for the calves and about twelve for the cows; twelve, fifteen.

MB: Did you lose any cows?

Morgan: I only let them have two head. But there was a lot of them they just dragged them off and shot them.

MB: That's something I didn't, I don't, understand. Was that up to you, the farmer, or the

government? How many got killed?

Irma: No, that was the government plan.

Morgan: Well, mostly up to the individual.

Irma: Well, yes, because it depended upon what the individual seemed to need in the amount of cash.

Morgan: If they couldn't feed them and couldn't see no way through, then they would let the government have these and the government would let people come in. Say you wanted a calf, I think they give the owner four dollars and then you could have the calf; you could come in and get the meat, anything that was good to eat. Sheep weren't the same way.

MB: Did some people lose their whole herd?

Morgan: Oh, I don't think any of em' went completely out, not that I know of.

MB: How did you feel about Roosevelt at the time? The New Deal?

Morgan: The president?

MB: Yes, did you like him?

Morgan: I think we've been a mess ever since he's got in.

MB: You didn't support him then?

Morgan: No, sir, I don't like this give-away program. I don't think it's good. Supply and demand is the only thing that will work in this world. Until we go back to it, we are going to keep it. You know, you can't borrow yourself out of debt.

MB: That's true.

Morgan: How are they going to keep a-raising wages and cut taxes, I can't figure it out.

MB: So you don't think that Roosevelt's New Deal was good for the country?

Morgan: Well, I know I am one of the few that don't go along with his program. But I don't think it brought them out, but he went in debt to bring them out and they have been going in debt ever since.

MB: You know one question I've asked people is, in our lifetime who has been your favorite president?

Morgan: My favorite?

MB: Who do you like the best?

Morgan: Oh, I liked old Teddy Roosevelt, but I was just a kid then.

MB: Can you remember him well?

Irma: Yes, to some extent, but I just thought a lot of that man. I thought he did a lot for us. But, ah, I'm like Morgan on these programs. You know, they cut you back on producing so much wheat and they paid you for not growing crops. We never entered into any of those programs. We didn't believe in them and we don't yet. We've stood on our own all during these times.

There was a wealthy man here at one time. They were bringing in flour, maybe it was wheat, but you could get it at cost, just a very, very few cents. You didn't have to pay the freight on it or anything, and the fellow contacted us and asked us about it. Morgan said, "No, I don't want it." And he said, "How are you fixed for flour"? And he said, "Oh, we're all right for right now." And he said, "But listen, John Doe, as much money as he gots, he's buying up tons of this." Morgan said, "That's all right for John Doe. I don't want it." And yet he was a moneyed man and didn't need it and we were as poor as crows and could've used it. But we didn't go along with the program. So, we got along and I think we have been better off for it. I haven't suffered.

MB: After those hard times in the 30s, when did things start picking up?

Morgan: Oh, they started picking up when Roosevelt took over. Well, I can't give you the date because I...

MB: No, I was just thinking just roughly. Did things get better during World War II?

Morgan: Oh, definitely. You always have programs come along in wars that starts money in circulation. It's like you going out here and borrowing money. You can have a good life while you can borrow, as long as you can borrow. See what New York City run into here a couple of years ago. They couldn't borrow any money.

Irma: No, and they were bankrupt, weren't they?

Morgan: Well, I guess they were yet. Uncle Sam kind of packing them along a little but...

MB: Have you been involved with the Co-op a long time?

Morgan: Have I been? Well, my family has been.

MB: Can you tell me anything about the earliest years of the Co-op, just how it was formed?

Morgan: No, it would be individual to buying stock. I was told that was the way it would be

formed. Farmer's cooperation.

Irma: Just family members that went in and picked it up.

Morgan: Now, Ralph would know about this then. I don't 'cause he has the books.

MB: O.K. Well, I'll talk to him about that.

Morgan: He's got the books to the Co-op. We work on it now. We're the officers in it, Ralph, Allen Bennion and myself. Old S.R. Bennion is Allen's grandfather, and he was one of the organizers.

MB: Did you know S.R.?

Morgan: I knew him, yes. He was the stake president. I can remember him when he was stake president.

MB: I heard he was quite a man.

Morgan: He was. And I can tell you what he said about his funeral.

MB: About his own funeral?

Morgan: About his own funeral.

MB: What did he say?

Morgan: He said to my father, "I want you to see that when they haul me off, that there isn't a piece of bailing wire or anything else on the harnesses that draws me to the cemetery."

Irma: Well, when we break down, poor people used to resort to bailing wire.

MB: Well, they still do today. I use it all the time.

Irma: Yes, you do today. But some harnesses were worse than others, but he didn't want any of that on the critters that took him to the funeral.

Morgan: Well, meaning he wanted things in order. He used that, you know, as an expression.

MB: Was he quite an orderly man?

Morgan: Absolutely. You bet he was. He wasn't buried here. They took him to Salt Lake. That was why he said to Father, see, that there was no bailing wire on the harness.

MB: I haven't heard that expression before. Can you remember World War I?

Morgan: Yes.

MB: Did you go to it? Were you in it?

Morgan: No, they wouldn't have me.

Irma: He's got a little tiny crippled foot.

MB: Did any of your family have to go to World War I?

Morgan: The brother older than me went.

MB: What was the attitude?

Morgan: Quite an experience he had, too. We have testimony that he bore about it here in a book. If you haven't read it, it might be well to read. Do you know where it is?

Irma: I think it's right here. If I know what color it is.

MB: What were the attitudes of the town? What did the people feel about World War I?

Morgan: Well, you know, we all hate wars. The majority of people hate wars. That was an '09 year. They hated to see the boys go. Now my brother was one of the first drafted in the Army. He was put in the Ninety-first Division. Oh, big man, he weighed 280 pounds. They took all big men and put them in the Ninety-first Division and trained them and trained them and there was only about six come back out of his division, six men. This testimony of his tells about it.

MB: Do you feel the people supported the government at that time?

Morgan: Well, yes. I think that the United States has always more so than anywhere today. I believe they did in them days, more than they do today.

MB: Well, see, the only war I can remember is Vietnam, and I know what the attitudes were. But they weren't like that then?

Morgan: No, they was quite loyal people in them days. They had been so poor so long, they couldn't do anything else.

MB: Did you buy war bonds then?

Morgan: In Two? [WWII]

MB: World War I.

Morgan: I didn't have any money in One.

MB: Were you in town when the war ended? On November 11, 1918?

Morgan: Well, we was up here on the road when we heard that.

Irma: We were coming down from the ranch in the wagon and way up to the farther end of the valley the little children were all marching down the street with little flags over their shoulders. They were marching and I said, "What on earth are Louise's kids doing?" And when we got a little farther, somebody said the war has ended and they were out celebrating, those little children.

MB: Did you go into town later that day?

Irma: I can't remember.

Morgan: Well, yes, we went into town but I can't tell you what took place from there on.

MB: I heard there was quite a celebration.

Morgan: There was. There was big celebration, but I can't tell you.

Irma: Bells rang and they just made all the noise they could. They were happy; we were all happy. Morgan was just...

Morgan: We was in town when World War II was declared. I was selling a bull that day. An old Jew, I said, "These are yours right along this side of the scale and other than that there mine." And somebody come out and said the United States is in war.

Irma: Came off the radio, too, that morning.

MB: Was it Pearl Harbor?

Morgan: Yes.

Irma: And we had a son get married just the night before Pearl Harbor.

MB: Did he have to go?

Irma: He was in it then. He had been in since April.

MB: Oh, he was in it before it started.

Irma: Yes, he was stationed in California at Fort Ord. He was up in... Where did Grant live then?

Morgan: With a friend, oh, up at Fort Ord.

Irma: Yes, but they were with my mother and my youngest brother.

MB: Do they live in Monterey?

Irma: Not then.

MB: I went to Fort Ord lived in Monterey.

Irma: Well, they lived in Pacific Grove, right close. I think they were in... I have forgotten the name of the town. Anyway, our son and his wife went up there and stayed that night with my mother, my mother and my youngest brother. Of course, that next morning early, about five o'clock, the neighbor who lived across the street, who was a general, came across and says, "We've been hit!" And he said, "Get back to your stations as fast you can." He said, "You're going to be shipped out."

Of course, we didn't know where to, but they were taken. He wrote us. He said, "I'm sitting under a big oak tree, but I can't tell you where, but," he said, "I wanted you to know that we're going over for a while. But we don't know what's going to take place."

They wouldn't let him tell us where he was and what they were doing, but they had just gotten off the sea coast. They were out in the country because they didn't know whether they would come over and hit us there. So they were taken all out somewhere. I don't know where. If he ever told me afterwards, I have forgotten it. But they were there for quite a little while and then he was shipped to Oklahoma for training with the horses, then up to Attu in the Aleutian Islands. He had some real experiences in the Aleutian Islands.

MB: I'll bet.

Irma: There was this one group, I don't know what they were doing, but they were hauling oil in big steel barrels and they had a big flat track that just slid over the snow like it was on runners and these barrels were standing up on that and two boys, two soldiers, sitting up behind the two big tractors that was pulling it. And these two boys were sitting on the front two barrels. Two of the front barrels and one of them fell off. Of course, the tractor just kept going. And I said, "Oh, what a horrible death that boy had!" After he come home, he was telling us about it. He said, "Mother, he didn't die." I said, "What happened? He was rolled over with all of that weight." And he says, "He just sank down in the snow." The steel plank that he was on rolled over him. He said he got up and he was all right. But there was this body mark in the snow where he had all of this tonnage go over him.

MB: That was lucky.

Irma: That is luck. If he had been down in the southern part, he would've been smashed right into the earth. He would've been buried. So they were lucky to be in snow. But he went through a lot of experiences up there. He had traveled all over the world during World War II. He was there for over five years. He saw most of the United States and a lot of the foreign countries.

MB: Is your brothers?

Irma: His brother.

*End of tape.